

INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BY

REV. LEWIS MAYER,

AT HIS

INAUGURATION AS PRINCIPAL

IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF THE GERMAN
REFORMED CHURCH, IN CARLISLE, PA.

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Inaugural Address.

I ADDRESS you on this occasion with no ordinary feelings. The numerous, complicated, and arduous duties, and the high responsibility of the station, to which divine providence seems to have appointed me ; in connexion with the scantiness of my provision for it, and the infirm state of my health, and the numerous other discouragements that rise into view on every side ; are adapted to create feelings, which bear with oppressive weight upon my mind.

It will be readily acknowledged by all, who admit the existence of God, and have taken the pains to put a few ideas together, that religion is a concern of the very highest moment. In it we have to do with him who is the author and the lord of our being ; by whose permission we breathe ; on whose will the destinies of heaven, earth, and hell depend ; who fills immensity, and lives forever. The interests which it involves are not limited by the continuance of this life : they reach beyond the grave, where every earthly good terminates, and are commensurate with eternity ; and in comparison with them all that the eye hath seen, or the ear hath heard, or that hath entered into the heart of man, is little and insignificant.

If religion be infinitely important, this character belongs to christianity ; and to it exclusively. Christianity is not one religion among many which are equally true ; it is the only religion which is certainly derived from God : it is therefore the only one which has the

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sanction of divine authority, and bears the impression of truth and certainty. All other religions may contain some truth; but we have no other means of ascertaining, for the most part, what is true or false in them, except a comparison with Christianity. Of the Christian religion we know that it "began at first to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, with signs, and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." The Lord, by whom it began to be spoken, claimed to be the only begotten Son of God, who was in the bosom of the Father, and was sent by him to be the Redeemer of a ruined world; and he established this high claim by a life of virtue and a train of illustrious miracles, which were entirely worthy of such a character and of such a mission: his apostles esteemed his glory a glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; the angels of heaven appeared with reverence near him; the spirits of hell fled from his presence; the Father himself bore testimony to his worth in a voice from heaven; and, when he died, the works of God, being moved, gave signs of the high dignity of his person and character. Those who heard him, and who have confirmed his doctrine unto us, were the apostles whom he had chosen; whom he prepared for their important office, and commanded to go and convert all nations to his religion: and to these apostles, while they were employed in this ministry, God himself bore testimony by signs, and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will. Nor does the Christian religion differ, as to its substance, from the religion of the patriarchs and of Moses: it is the same great plan of redemption which God revealed at first in Paradise, and afterwards published by the patriarchs and the prophets, and was pleased to represent by the shadows of sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law, and finally accomplished by his only begotten Son. The promise of the woman's seed who should bruise the serpent's head, while the serpent bruised him; the bloody sacrifices which the faithful offered to God be-

fore the flood; the preaching of patriarchs and of prophets; the institutions of Moses; the remarkable interpositions of God; and the various signal deliverances of his people; all had a reference to Jesus the Christ; and, while they nourished the faith of believers in a coming Saviour, formed a mighty apparatus to prepare the way for his manifestation in the world, and for the establishment of his kingdom to the end of time. A religion which was published by such ministers, and was accredited by such attestations from heaven, and was ushered in by such a series of introductory provisions, bears every mark of a Divine Original, and approves itself as a faithful saying worthy of all acceptance. But no such evidence, and no evidence which bears the remotest resemblance to this, can be adduced in favour of any other religion on earth. Modern Judaism is not the religion of Abraham, and Moses, and David, and Isaiah; it is not the religion to which the attestations of heaven were given under the old covenant; but a mass of human traditions, which have corrupted the institutions of God, and have destroyed their essential import, and their saving tendency; and which God has disowned, by giving up his ancient people to be an astonishment, and a proverb, and a bye-word, among all the nations whither they are scattered, according to the awful warning which he gave them, by his servant Moses, concerning the curse which should fall upon them, when they should have forsaken his law.* The miracles of Moses and the prophets were wrought in attestation of that religion, which was the shadow of good things to come, and of which the substance is in Christ. And if modern Judaism has no just pretensions to a divine original, and divine testimonials of its truth, surely no other religion on earth, except the Christian, can set forth such a claim.

If Christianity be the only religion which God has ever given to man, it is the only one by which a sinner can be saved. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," said Jesus, "no man cometh to the Father but

* Deuteronomy 28.

by me.”† “He that hath the son, hath life,” said the apostle of Jesus, “and he that hath not the son, hath not life.”‡ On this ground St. Paul founded the necessity of publishing the gospel to all over whom the Lord was rich in mercy.¶ On this ground Jesus himself founded the command which he addressed to his apostles, and, in them, to the collective ministry of the Christian church in every succeeding age, saying, “Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be damned.”¶¶

We do not enquire what God is able, or is not able, to do, for the salvation of those, to whom the light of Christianity has not arisen. He may undoubtedly accomplish whatever in his sovereign pleasure he designs to do; but it is certain that many things are in his power which he never does; yea many things which we ardently desire that he should do; though in our estimation it would entirely comport with his character to do them; and though to us it would seem a beautiful exhibition of his glory to do them. In the case of Jesus there was evidently a possibility that the Father might remove the appointed cup, without defeating the purpose of his mercy toward his people; yet the cup was not taken away, though its removal was anxiously, and tearfully sought, and though the supplicant was the Son of God. God is to us an unknown being, except as far as he has revealed himself. “No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.”§ The will and the purpose of God must therefore be learned from his own revelation. To reason concerning them from abstract principles; to speculate about them a priori; to infer that God will do certain things, because we think it would be agreeable to his character; and would glorify his name to do them; is both presumptuous and absurd. We are often mistaken about the intentions of a man with whom we have an intimate acquaintance. How then can we

† John 14. 6. ‡ 1 John 5, 12. ¶ Rom. 10, 12—27. ¶¶ Mark 16, 16.
§ Matthew 11, 27.

pretend to know the unrevealed designs of God, of whom so little is known, or can be known, even by the most exalted intelligences of the worlds of light, and still so much less by the weak dull creature man? The character of God too, as well as his will and purpose, must be learned from his revelation: before we are taught by him we know almost as little of the one, as we know of the other: and in learning his character, we must learn it in a great measure from what he has revealed concerning his will and his purposes. When a man tells us seriously what his intentions are; what desires and what designs he entertains; we are then in possession of just so much of his character. It would surely be very preposterous and absurd, if we should form our opinion of him without consulting this information, even when it is freely offered; and it would be still more so, if we should then turn round and maintain, that these desires and designs cannot belong to him, because they contradict his character. So, in like manner, when God has told us what his will, his designs, and his purposes, are, we learn from them, as far as they go, what kind of being he is, what attributes he possesses, and what the nature of these attributes is; and in forming our opinion of his character, we must form it, of course, agreeably to this information; for there can be no doubt that all his attributes are in perfect harmony with his whole will, and his every purpose, and are indeed the source from whence they spring. If all that can be known of the mind of God must be learned from his own revelation, it is very presumptuous to affirm that God will do a certain thing, if, in that revelation, he has not declared that he will do it; and this presumption assumes the form of unbelief and impiety, if we maintain that God will do such a thing, if, in that revelation, he has expressly declared that he will not do it. Now the only revelation of the will and purpose of God concerning his fallen creatures, which we have, is the Bible. We are of course limited to the bible in all our enquiries on this interesting and awful subject, and are bound to receive its information, with humble submission and reverence, as an authority

from which there is no appeal. But the bible does not inform us that God will save any portion of the human family without faith in Christ: on the contrary it declares that Christ is the way, and the truth, and the life; that no man cometh to the Father but by him; and that those, who are without Christ, have no hope, and are without God in the world.* If it be objected that this view of the purpose of God disagrees with his known love, and mercy and grace, we reply that these attributes of the divine character must be viewed in that light, in which the revealed purpose of God presents them. It was in that light that the apostles viewed them, and saw in them an inexpressible richness: it was when they considered the purpose of God to save sinners by faith in Christ, that they were overpowered and said, "God is love." We do not question the power of God to communicate to a Gentile, in some supernatural way, as much of the Christian faith as may be sufficient for his salvation; nor do we feel inclined to dispute, if any maintain that God does, in certain instances, grant such communications to men, who never heard the preaching of the gospel, and never saw any of its sacred records; but we do maintain that, as far as we know any thing of the purpose of God, faith in Christ is the only method by which a sinner will be saved.

It is therefore infinitely important that the Christian religion should be published to all nations: it is designed to become universal: the Christian ministry, and, in them, the Christian church, are divinely commanded to make it so; and every believer in Christ is taught to pray, in his daily addresses at the Throne of Grace, that the Redeemer's kingdom may come.

It is equally important that all, to whom the gospel comes, should be well instructed in it. Errors in religion are errors in a most momentous concern. They are not indeed all of equal moment; some errors do not affect the substance of Christianity, and therefore do not exclude us from the kingdom of heaven; but no error is profitable to the soul; and many errors,

* Ephesians 2, 12.

though they are not ruinous, are highly pernicious. If a man designs to build a temple for the service of God, and builds upon Jesus Christ, as the only foundation that is laid, or can be laid, but uses base materials for his building, and instead of constructing a noble edifice of gold, silver, and precious stones, puts up a wretched hovel made of wood, hay, and stubble, he may indeed be saved, in the day when his work shall be tried by fire, as a man escapes from his building on fire, by rushing desparately through the flames; but all his work is burnt up.* So may an erring believer, who, with many important errors, still holds the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, be finally saved, by a narrow escape from destruction, and with great and irreparable loss: but if he errs in essential points: if he rejects the gospel of Christ, or, by false interpretations, expunges from it any of its fundamental doctrines, his error is fatal, and his ruin is eternal.

The Christian religion is contained in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Whatever things are strictly essential to salvation are taught in the Holy Scriptures with so much plainness, that any serious, humble, enquiring reader may sufficiently understand them; and, with no other help than the bible, or a portion of it, and the ordinary assistance of the Holy Spirit, he may be saved. But it cannot be denied that the bible has its difficulties. Written in languages which have long ceased to be spoken, and in times which have long since passed away; published originally for the use of people whose institutions, customs and manners, opinions, and numerous other peculiarities, were entirely different from our own; interwoven throughout with those peculiarities; treating of things to which the carnal mind is averse, and against which it has formed a strong array of passions and prejudices; and delivering its instructions occasionally, and with regard to system; we do not know a book which is more frequently misunderstood, or which has more need of explanation than the bible. Much of its meaning is unknown, much of its beauty unseen, much of its power unfelt, by ordi-

* 1 Cor. 3, 10—15.

nary readers ; many things in it seem unsuitable ; some things have the appearance of contradiction ; meanings are extracted from it which the inspired author never intended ; and partly by ignorance, partly by wickedness, the sacred text is made subservient to almost every possible form of heresy. Hence the serious, humble enquirer is left in darkness on many important points, and is often much perplexed with occurring difficulties ; and though with the guidance of the Divine Spirit, he will still find his way to heaven, yet, without explanation, he loses much of that edification which a better knowledge of the bible would supply, and generally adopts some errors ; some false views of faith, of duty, or of hope ; which hinder his spiritual improvement.

But the Bible must be defended as well as explained. Attacks have been made upon it, and will be made, in a great variety of forms, and by every description of unbelievers. The purity and the integrity of the sacred text ; the genuineness and the authenticity of some entire books, and of certain portions of other books ; the divine inspiration of the sacred writers ; and the truth and authority of the whole bible ; have been called into question, or boldly denied : and these attacks have been sometimes made with so much learning and skill ; or, at least, with so much boldness ; that the serious, but untaught, believer has suffered not a little embarrassment ; and, in holding fast his faith, has been tossed with conflicting thoughts, like the ship at anchor amid the violence of a storm.

For both these purposes, and for every other, which is connected with the conversion of sinners, and the improvement of the saints, God has appointed a ministry in the church. The Christian ministry are charged with numerous, important, and arduous duties : by them must sinners be gathered unto Christ ; by them must the Lord's people be instructed and built up in their most holy faith ; to them we turn for light upon the dark places of the bible ; to them we look for the defence of our religion ; it is theirs to prevent or suppress errors ; it is theirs to disseminate the truth ; immortal souls are en-

trusted to their hands; the honour of the Redeemer, and the interests of eternity are committed to them. Such treasures was it the good pleasure of God to put into earthen vessels. When Christian ministers dwell in contemplation on the nature and the duties of their office, they may justly be "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling," and may say with Paul, Who is sufficient for these things? We know that their sufficiency is of God; that all their success is due to his goodness; and that all the glory of it belongs to him: but they must have those qualifications which belong to their office, since it is certain that God ordinarily works by means, and chooses to employ those means which are adapted to his purposes. A Christian minister, who has the spirit of his office, will therefore zealously endeavour to have both his understanding and his heart prepared, by every thing that can prepare them, whether he receives it from Heaven or from men, for duties so various, so difficult, and so awful; and he will earnestly desire that every man, who assumes the office of the gospel ministry, may have the same preparation.

It is indispensable, for a faithful and profitable discharge of the duties of his office, that a Christian minister be well acquainted with the whole system of religion which God has revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures, and with whatever belongs to the interpretation or to the defence of the sacred books. Without this knowledge, how can he explain to his people the doctrines which they ought to believe, and the duties which they are bound to perform, and the hope which they are authorized to cherish? How can he lead them into an accurate knowledge of the bible, and open to them its hidden treasures? How can he solve their difficulties, and correct their mistakes, and silence their contradictions? How can he vindicate the true faith against the numerous and diversified enemies, who assail it on every side, and in every manner, and endeavour one while to corrupt it, and another to destroy it? It is idle, it is presumptuous, it is impious, to expect, or to pray, that God should fit him for his work, in every particular instance, by an immediate inspiration, while the ordinary

means of acquiring the requisite knowledge are neglected, and then to cast the blame of his failures upon God, and to say that, it was not the Lord's will that he should succeed better. It is impious to open his mouth in the name of God, and then, instead of the pure doctrine of the bible, to utter his own crude fancies, and his wretched mixtures of truth and falsehood.

We do not suppose that mere knowledge is alone sufficient to form a useful minister of Christ : he must undoubtedly be truly pious : his own experience of the power of religion must lead him into the spirit of the doctrine of Christ; his own love to the Redeemer must awaken and invigorate his zeal; his own example must illustrate his descriptions of the Christian character, and give additional weight to his exhortations. Without real piety he may be a dangerous divine; and the more dangerous in proportion as he is the more learned : he will be at least a useless one, except in what belongs to the form of religion; and, with all his knowledge, he is a blind leader of the blind.

But no measure of piety can alone qualify any man for the gospel ministry. It is a bad proof of his piety, if an ignorant man thrusts himself into this arduous, this awfully important office, unless he can shew very satisfactory proofs of a special call from heaven. There is a very active spiritual pride at the bottom of this irregular zeal. It is a poor vindication of it to say that good is done. God may, and in many instances does, bring good out of evil; but this overruling mercy does not justify the evil. The good also, which is spoken of, is often very questionable : it is associated with much harm, and frequently terminates in nothing else : and this unprepared and uncalled builder will find at last that he is one of those, whose work is burnt up. It is therefore indispensable that a man, who undertakes the office of the Christian ministry, be previously taught; that a sufficient time be employed in his instruction; and that the best attainable means be used for this important end.

It cannot be reasonably doubted that a well organized, and well governed, Théological Seminary furnishes to students of divinity means to aid & facilitate their studies, which they can seldom, perhaps never, find elsewhere.

The utility and importance of Theological Seminaries are amply attested by the practice of our sister churches, and by the growing estimation in which they are held, where the light of experience is shewing forth their good effects. They may undoubtedly be much abused, like every thing else; but they are not for that reason the less useful, or the less valuable, when they are well managed: and if the establishment of such institutions be the best practicable plan for the purpose of providing for the church a pious and well-taught ministry, it is as much our duty to establish them, and to manage them well, as it is our duty to promote the interests of the religion of Christ. Theological Seminaries are not a new invention: they are as old as the most ancient prophets of God. Samuel, and Elias, and Elisha, were at the head of schools of the prophets in Israel. Those schools indeed were not the same as modern Theological Seminaries in their form; but they were undoubtedly the same in their principle: the design of them was to prepare pious young men for the office of public teaching, by a suitable course of instruction and discipline. The religion of the Jews was the basis of their political economy, their civil jurisprudence, their philosophy, and their literature; the whole constitution of their commonwealth was religious: its design was to make them a holy people; and the being and the worship of Jehovah were therefore associated with all the business of the state; and with all the pursuits of private life. On this account all the public teachers of the Jews were religious teachers, and the duties of devotion formed a principal part of their daily ministrations. What is called their prophesying with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a harp, and a pipe before them,* was the praising of God in hymns, which were accompanied with the tones of these musical instruments. When they were thus employed, they were often favoured with inspirations from Heaven; and then they prophesied in the sense to which the word is now restricted. These religious teachers were educated in the schools of the prophets: they were called the sons of the prophets and the children of the prophets; and the inspired men of God who were at their head, were called their fathers.† It was from among these

* 1 Sam. 10, 5. † 1 Sam. 10, 12. 2 Kings 2, 12.

that God was pleased usually to take those extraordinary ministers, who are emphatically styled the prophets, and who were known more anciently by the title of seers. Amos remarked in his answer to Amaziah, the king of Israel, "I was no prophet, neither a prophet's son, but I was a herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit, and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go prophesy unto my people Israel.* If it had not been unusual, and not out of the ordinary course of God's proceeding, to call a man to the prophetic office, who had not been prepared for it by a suitable education, Amos would not have spoken of it, as a remarkable peculiarity of his own case, that he was not a prophet, neither a prophet's son, that is, he was not an educated religious teacher, when God commanded him to go and prophesy to his people. In the Christian church seminaries for the education of youth, especially of those who were destined for the holy ministry, were established at a very early period. Dr. Mosheim, in his Ecclesiastical History states, on the authority of two very ancient Christian fathers,† that St. John erected a school of this kind at Ephesus, and another of the same nature was founded by Polycarp at Smyrna. Another which obtained a high reputation, was established at Alexandria in Egypt: it was commonly called the catechetical school, and is generally supposed to have been created by St. Mark. Mr. Maclain, the translator of Mosheim, has added in a note on this place, "The Alexandrian school was renowned for a succession of learned divines, as we find by the accounts of Eusebius and Jerome; for after St. Mark, Pantænus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and many others taught in it the doctrines of the gospel, and made it a famous seminary for Christian philosophy and religious knowledge. There were also at Rome, Antioch, Cæsarea, Edessa, and several other places, schools of the same nature, though not all of equal reputation."‡ Dr. Mosheim thinks "we may undoubtedly attribute to the apostles themselves, and their injunctions to their disciples, the excellent establishments, in which the youth destined for the holy ministry received an education suit-

* Amos 7, 14. 15. † Irenæus in the 2d century and Eusebius in the 4th. ‡ Mosheim Eccl. Hist. Cent. 1. Pars 2. Chap. 7.

able to the solemn office they were to undertake." There is certainly much reason to think so, since these schools arose so early as the apostolic age, and under the eyes of John at Ephesus, of Mark at Alexandria, and of Polycarp, the disciple of John, at Smyrna; and since we know that the ancient prophets established similar schools in Israel, in the earliest times of the Jewish church: and if these establishments have their origin from prophets, and apostles, we are unquestionably entitled to claim for them divine approbation and divine authority; and if we manage them agreeably to the mind of God, we may confidently hope that, in answer to our prayers, he will pour out upon them a good measure of his gracious blessing.

There is, perhaps, at present, no want of Theological Seminaries for the education of the pious youth, who are destined for the service of the English Churches. It is the glory of our sister churches that they have erected so many schools of the prophets, and have placed over them pious and able professors and have not restricted the use of them to students of their own denominations: we rejoice in the success of these noble institutions, as we always do rejoice in the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom: but none of these is adapted to the exigences of the German Churches: differences of language, of habits, and of feelings, and some other circumstances will generally preclude the German youth from the benefits of these seminaries, and will incline them to seek their preparation for the gospel ministry elsewhere, even under all the disadvantages of private tuition.

A German Theological Seminary, the benefits of which are not limited to the Reformed Church, but are freely offered to the pious youth of all denominations, cannot fail to exert a happy influence on the interests of true religion: for the prosperity of the Reformed Church, at least, it is indispensable. The recent history, and the present state of our Church are teaching us a lesson on this subject, which every one, who has an ear to hear, and a heart to feel, acknowledges to be true, solemn, and affecting. It was urged also a few years ago, in a very pressing and very affectionate address to the ministers and the members of the German

Church, by a venerable servant of the Lord, who is now resting in the peaceful slumber of the grave, and whose spirit is gone to be where Jesus is, the late pious and learned Dr. I. H. Livingston, of New Brunswick. The German Synod then felt the necessity of having a Theological Seminary, and laboured and prayed for its establishment: it has continued to feel the same thing, and to labour and to pray for the same object: it has suffered painful reverses and mortifying disappointments: the prospect before it has been often overcast with a distressing darkness, and the last glimmerings of hope have seemed about to vanish in the thickening gloom: at this moment all is not bright: many are the clouds that still hang around us, and are ready to gather, and to break again in, perhaps, a heavier tempest: but we think we see the hand of God, and the light of his countenance, in the transactions of this day; and, though other trials may, be yet in preparation for us, we indulge the hope that the day-spring of a happier time is at hand, and that the Lord's time to favour our Zion is come.

I have now assumed the office of the Professorship of Theology in this Seminary. What qualifications I possess for it, I do not know; what awaits me in it, I cannot tell; but believing that it is the Lord's doing, I draw my encouragement thence: He who formed the world out of nothing, and governs the universe by his power; who feeds the sparrow and adorns the flower; is able to make of me whatever he will; is able to support me under every difficulty, and will never leave me nor forsake me; and while I can lift my eyes to Heaven, and can say to him, my Father, and my God, I will not despair.

THE END.



